



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Agriculture, stand up and be counted!

OLYMPIA – If you're among nearly 20 percent of Washington farmers and ranchers who have not returned their 2003 agriculture census forms, it's not too late. "Take time today to stand up and be counted," says Valoria Loveland, director of the state Department of Agriculture. "With multiple pressures affecting the economic viability of our farms, every response is significant because it helps with the development of future programs."

With an 82 percent response rate to date, Washington is slightly above the national average of 79 percent. Island County is leading the state with a response rate of 87 percent. Kitsap County is in 2nd place with 86 percent. Trailing behind are Grant County with 78 percent and Franklin County with 75 percent. Taken only once every five years, the census is the only source of detailed county-level information about Washington agriculture.

"Our goal is to hear from everyone who received a census form, even if they are no longer farming," says Ray Garibay, state statistician at U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service. "If we don't hear from them, we don't know if they're farming or not."

Garibay says the census is needed to tell the story of agriculture. For example, it shows that agriculture is the largest industry in Skagit County. About 60 crops worth more than \$100 million are grown on 65,000 acres. Primary fresh market vegetables are potatoes, sweet corn, broccoli, cauliflower, pumpkins and squash. About half the nation's supply of spinach seed, beet seed, and cabbage seed comes from the Skagit region.

An accurate report of the farm operations in every state and county will paint a complete and detailed picture of the nation's agriculture. "Ag organizations use the data to evaluate and propose programs and policies to help producers, and researchers use the data to develop new technologies," says Garibay. Census data are also used to:

- Examine long-term trends and anticipate the future direction of agriculture.
- Allocate local and national funds for farm programs.
- Help agribusiness develop sales territories and marketing plans for fertilizer, seed, processing, storage, transportation and equipment.
- Help state and federal agencies evaluate the effects of changes in farm legislation.
- Assess patterns in water use and irrigation to determine resource and management needs.
- Allocate cooperative extension funding, services and research at the local level.

For help completing the census, visit USDA's Web site at www.nass.usda.gov/census/ or call (888) 4AG-STAT.

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